

COMPELLING LOVE BIBLE STUDIES

“The love of Christ compels us...” 2 Corinthians 5:14.

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Growing Into Maturity By Finding Security In Christ

By Clinton Meharry

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With Suggested Answers For All Questions (see pages 253-274)

Main Bible Translation Used - Unless otherwise noted, all the Bible references are from the New King James Version. It will make it easier to follow along if you use this version when you answer the questions that have blanks to fill in.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

I grew up in a Christian home with two loving parents and three older brothers. Attending church each week was a part of life. We enjoyed the fellowship and friendships that developed. My parents willingly sacrificed for all of us to be able to attend Christian schools. The home, school and church experience provided a positive and Biblical foundation for me to build my life upon.

At age fifteen, my Christian life became more personal through positive influences of teachers and classmates. I began to fall in love with Jesus as I read the story of Jesus in the Bible along with a wonderful commentary called, “The Desire of Ages.”

The next year, a thought came into my mind. “I would like to be a minister and help others come to know Jesus as a personal Friend and Savior.” Then another thought came. “If I am going to be a minister, I better take this seriously.”

As I began to focus on how I was doing, I could always find fault with myself. Without a good understanding of the gospel, I began to live with a constant, nagging guilt. Eventually, that guilt led to much insecurity and a feeling of shame. That emotional pain led to seeking “pain relievers.” For me, that took the form of binging on food. It provided temporary pleasure, but it also led to more guilt. I found myself stuck in a cycle of addiction: guilt, shame, pain, pain reliever, guilt.... Since it was an “acceptable” addiction, and something I could hide, no one noticed but me.

The shame and insecurity kept me from seeking out the help that I needed. I almost gave up Christianity, for it wasn’t working for me. But I had seen others who had given up and noticed that they weren’t happy. I knew that Jesus was “the answer,” I just hadn’t figured out how to experience peace and victory for myself.

For 14 years I limped along in my struggling, Christian life. Looking back at those years, I recognize that God was removing any confidence in myself that might lead to pride or that might lead me away from trusting in His grace and righteousness alone.

God was also faithful to provide the help and encouragement that I needed to nurture me along. This came through family and friends, personal quiet time with Him, answers to prayer and His remarkable leading in my life.

Then in His wonderful providence and timing, He led me to understand the gospel foundation more clearly than ever before. I began to experience an inner peace and security that has led to a growing maturity in my relationship with God and others. I experienced freedom from the addictive cycle, victory in the Christian life and a new motivation for living for God.

In John 8:31,32, Jesus said, “If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.” Having experienced freedom and joy through Jesus, it is my desire to share this good news with others.

It is my prayer that God will be able to use these Bible Studies to help many others understand and experience His unconditional love for the human race.

Knowing we can help each other learn and grow, I welcome and appreciate any suggestions, questions, or ideas you have as you study these lessons. May God bless each of us with the Holy Spirit that He may lead us step by step into all the truth He has for us. “When He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” John 16:13.

Your brother in Christ,

Clinton Meharry

APPRECIATION

The people who have influenced me in life are by far too many to list here. I would like to say thank you to my wife, Joan, for her love and faithfulness. Her friendship and prayer support has been a great encouragement and inspiration to me.

I would like to thank my son and daughter, Jonathan and Cherie, for their patience with me as I have grown, their forgiveness when I have failed, and the joy they have brought to me as we have lived together as a family.

I would like to thank my parents for their loving sacrifice in providing a Christian education and for their wonderful example of choosing to follow God. In each stage of their lives they have grown and have sought to live for Jesus and serve Him in their church, their family and their community.

Most of all, I would like to thank God for His amazing grace and wonderful love. He indeed is worthy to be worshipped and adored. He is the One who truly makes life worth living.

INTRODUCTION – BALANCED LIVING

WISE AND FOOLISH BUILDERS

At the end of His “sermon on the mount,” Jesus made a bold statement that challenges every living person:

“Whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: And the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.”

“But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall” Matthew 7:24-27.

Jesus left no room for misunderstanding His statement. It was either true or false. He was either the solid foundation to build one’s life upon or He was a great liar. He definitely got the attention of the people. Matthew reports their response:

“And so it was, when Jesus had ended these sayings, that the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes” Matthew 7:28,29.

Jesus compared our lives with building a house on a rock or on sand. When we build our lives on a firm foundation we will be able to withstand the storms life throws at us. When we build on a sandy foundation, our lives will crack, crumble and fall when the stress increases and the hurricane force winds blow.

JESUS IS THE FOUNDATION

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul wrote, “According to the grace of God which was given to me, as a wise master builder I have laid the

foundation, and another builds on it. But let each one take heed how he builds on it. For no other foundation can anyone lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.”

Jesus is the foundation for life and Christianity. Understanding what He has already accomplished for the human race provides inner peace and security. It changes our whole perspective in life and our motive for living. Jesus truly is a solid foundation to build our lives upon. He is able to give us something that the world never can:

“Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid” John 14:27.

The world’s peace is based on everything going smoothly in life. Since there are always problems, the world’s peace is very shallow. The peace that Jesus gives is based on understanding His unconditional love and salvation, experiencing His forgiveness and trusting His promises.

Even in the midst of very difficult circumstances, Jesus had inner peace. Those who abide in Him will also experience the peace that He gives.

- “These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world” John 16:33.
- “You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You” Isaiah 26:3.
- “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” Philippians 4:6,7.

When we are filled with anxiety, we are invited to lay all our problems before God, trusting that He will listen and act according to His infinite wisdom, knowledge of the future, and love for everyone involved. Peace comes when we trust Him and thank Him for doing this.

WALLS: MAJOR TEACHINGS OF THE BIBLE

When we choose to build our lives on Jesus, we will have a solid foundation to build our “house” upon. We can then add the exterior walls and the roof that provide protection from bad weather and thieves. The roof and exterior walls could be compared to studying and understanding the major teachings of the Bible.

The truth in the Bible enables us to learn God’s perspective of life today, His knowledge of the past, and His promises for the future. These truths help us to recognize and resist Satan’s lies, temptations, and threats and also help us to grow up into maturity (John 8:32-36; Ephesians 4:11-16).

In the light of the gospel, the teachings of the Bible reveal a beautiful picture of who God is, what He is like, and how He is working to bring a complete end to the sin problem and all the pain and suffering it causes.

The truth gives us hope for the future as we look forward to the time when “the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” Revelation 21:3, 4.

ROOMS: A LIVING RELATIONSHIP WITH JESUS

When the foundation, outside walls and roof are in place, then we begin building and refining the inside of the house. This is where we spend our time and focus on our relationships.

This illustrates the living relationship we have with Jesus when we abide in Him and let Him abide in us (John 15:4, 5). “If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him” John 14:23.

Jesus will never force His way in. He says, “I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” Revelation 3:20.

As we fellowship with Jesus, our trust in Him grows stronger. We learn to recognize His voice and learn that life is truly worth living because He loves us and has a plan for our lives. We also discover there is no greater joy in life than working with Him to be a blessing to others.

ALL THREE PARTS ARE IMPORTANT

Without the foundation, the exterior walls and roof, or the inside rooms, a house would not be complete. In the same way, our Christian experience will not be complete if we neglect any one of the following:

- A. The gospel foundation
- B. The study of the Bible to understand what God says about life
- C. A living relationship with Jesus

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING THE GOSPEL

Since the foundation is not something we generally see, some might be tempted to think it isn't very important. When we fail to build a house on a solid foundation, major problems will arise. In the same way, when we fail to build our lives on Jesus, we will struggle. We will think our value and assurance of salvation comes from how good of a relationship we have with God, how mature we are, or what good things we have accomplished. This will lead to insecurity and a focus on ourselves:

Have I studied enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I witnessed enough? Have I truly repented? Do I have enough faith? Why am I not growing more than I am? Why is it taking so long? How can I know God loves and accepts me if I am always falling? Will I ever be good enough to find acceptance with God and make it to heaven?

Standing on the proper foundation frees us from serving God out of fear and selfish motives. It enables us to grow up into maturity and live for Him out of loving appreciation for His wonderful gift of salvation.

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING GOD'S PERSPECTIVE

A house without walls and a roof is not a house. In the same way, Christianity without the Bible is not Christianity. Some people say it doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you believe in God. It doesn't matter what you believe, as long as you are a good person.

If we applied this way of thinking to ourselves, we would say, "It doesn't matter if a person believes I am honest or a liar, trustworthy or a thief, kind or abusive, loving or greedy. As long as they recognize that I exist, that is all that matters." Of course, we would object to that idea. We want to be represented correctly.

God also wants to be represented correctly. That is why He gave us the Bible. That is also one of the reasons why Jesus came to earth. He wanted to reveal what God is truly like. If we neglect to study the Bible, we will open ourselves up to Satan's clever deceptions and counterfeits. The trials and circumstances of life would then lead us to question God, doubt the gospel and trust in our own wisdom and strength.

Instead of understanding the truth from God's perspective, we will create our own ideas about God. We will then begin to worship a god who is made in our image, rather than letting God reveal the truth about Himself. Since God is so much greater than we are, it is impossible for us to come up with the truth about Him on our own.

God stated it very clearly. "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the Lord. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts" Isaiah 55:8,9.

DANGER FROM NEGLECTING TO LIVE WITH JESUS

On the other hand, we can fall into another extreme. We can be tempted to relax and say, “My house is very sturdy. It has a strong foundation and the walls and roof are solid. It will always be there when I need it. I want to ‘enjoy’ some of what this world has to offer. I can pursue the ‘pleasures of sin’ for awhile, doing whatever I want to do. Then when I need Jesus, He will always be there in the house waiting for me. Whenever I am ready, I’ll come back and spend some time with Him.”

Unfortunately, many who fall into this trap become addicted to the “passing pleasures of sin” Hebrews 11:25. Their desire for a relationship with Jesus becomes less and less. Eventually many decide they don’t want any fellowship with Him at all, for they have come to love “darkness rather than light” John 3:19.

After believing lies about God, they reject the truth and would rather die than live with Jesus (2 Thessalonians 2:11-12; Revelation 6:14-16).

A Balanced Understanding Of The Bible Will Include:

1. Understanding the gospel foundation:
 - A. What Jesus has accomplished for the whole human race.
 - B. What He has saved us from, what He is saving us from, and what He will save us from.
2. Understanding God’s perspective of life today, His knowledge of the past, and His promises for the future.
3. Experiencing a living relationship with Jesus:
 - A. How do we respond to the gospel?
 - B. What does God promise to do for every believer?
 - C. How can we experience healing and live for the glory of God?

CAN WE TRUST THE BIBLE?

Today, advertisers work hard at getting our attention, hoping we will buy the products they are promoting. We are used to exaggerated claims, attention grabbing pictures, and publicity stunts. Was Jesus using exaggerated claims in order to get our attention or was He communicating truth people could rely on?

These Bible Study guides are based on the conviction that Jesus truly is the “Savior of the world” John 4:42. There is much evidence to support this belief. This conviction is based upon careful evaluation of life, history, and the study of the Bible.

Intelligent Designer - Every product that we buy in a store has been designed and created by someone. We know it didn't just accidentally evolve into a piece of furniture, a computer, or some other gadget. In the same way, human beings and the world we live in are too complex to simply have evolved accidentally. The evidence is strong that there is an Intelligent Designer who created life and the world.

“Since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse” Romans 1:20.

Fulfillment Of Prophecy - The Bible claims to be a book that reveals who this God is and what He is like. Can the Bible be trusted? God tells us how we can know.

“Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure’” Isaiah 46:9,10.

The Bible is full of evidence that God has accurately foretold events in the future. Daniel 2 is a simple prophecy that outlines 2500 years of history in advance. So far it has been accurately fulfilled. The rest of the prophecies of Daniel and Revelation build on this simple outline and add more details in each succeeding prophecy.

Personal Testimonies - The life-changing testimonies of people give evidence that Jesus truly is a living Savior. Those who believe the truth and surrender their lives to Him discover the power of God to transform lives. The Bible promises amazing things:

1. “The truth will set you free” John 8:32.
2. The Holy Spirit will produce the qualities that everyone is wanting. “The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness. self-control” Galatians 5:22,23.
3. Forgiveness, hope, and eternal life with God. “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” John 3:16.

When people experience God’s unconditional love, they will say with Paul, “The love of Christ compels me...” 2 Corinthians 5:14. “I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes” Romans 1:16.

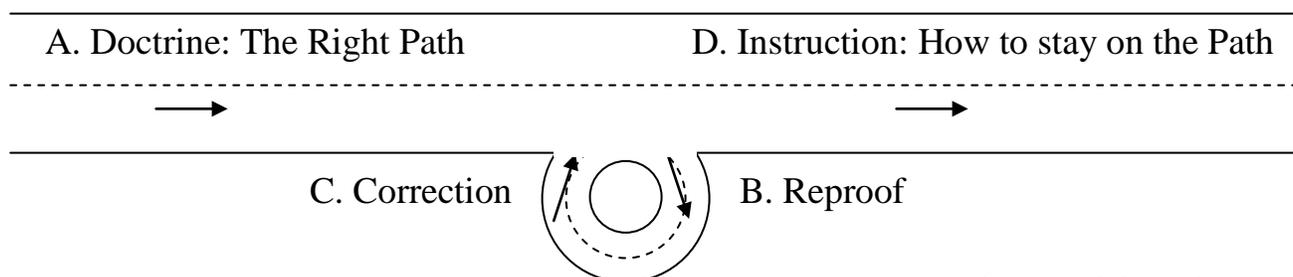
The transformation and testimonies of those who believe the truth will attract people to Jesus (Revelation 12:11). After Jesus healed a person who was demon possessed, people were afraid of Him. They asked Him to leave. Jesus then asked the one who had been healed to go back to his home and share his testimony with everyone. The man obeyed and shared “in Decapolis all that Jesus had done for him; and all marveled” Mark 5:20. Several months later, Jesus came back to the region to find many people anxious to see Him. That is where He fed over 4000 people with seven loaves of bread and a few small fish (Mark 7:31-8:9).

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE BIBLE?

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

- A. Doctrine: The Bible teaches us what is true and right, describing Jesus as “The Way, the Truth, and the Life” John 14:6.
- B. Reproof: There are many detours along the way that distract us away from God. We are tempted to think these detours will bring us more happiness and love, but they always lead to more pain and brokenness. The Bible is faithful to reprove us when we stray from the right path so we can see where we have gone wrong.
- C. Correction: God’s grace and forgiveness enables us to experience healing and restoration. He leads us back onto the right path.
- D. Instruction in Righteousness: When we understand how painful and deceptive the detours are, we have a desire to avoid them. When we understand how amazing God’s grace is for everyone, it creates within us a desire to work for Him and glorify Him. The Bible provides instruction to help us stay on the right path.
- E. Thoroughly equipped: When people grow into maturity, God is able to use them more effectively in helping others.

Summary - The Bible Is Profitable For:



BORN TO BE SAVIOR

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Jesus was born to love and bring healing;
Born to be Savior, born to be King.
Filled with compassion, He knows what we're feeling.
Born our Redeemer, new life He'll bring.

Leaving aside His power and glory,
He became helpless and human by birth.
Learning from Mary the miracle story;
Jesus soon learned of His mission on earth.

Filled with the Spirit, wisdom, and kindness,
He came to free us from death and our sin.
Teaching the humble, removing our blindness,
He died to save us and live within.

(Words can be sung to the melody, "Morning Has Broken")